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authors, one having been known to attain the size of seven feet five inches in circumference, and the weight of thirty-four pounds in three weeks, and others the weight of twelve pounds in a few days. But none of these statements, remarkable as they are, are so wonderful as one which is made by Sir Joseph Banks of a circumstance which occurred under his own roof. He states that a friend having sent him a cask of wine, which was too new and sweet for present use, it was locked up in a cellar to mature. At the end of three years, Sir Joseph, supposing that time had now done its work, proceeded to open his cellar and inspect its contents. Little did he think how time had been employed, and little did he conceive what would be the contents of that cellar. The door refused to open, and being invincible by gentle means, he had it fairly cut away; but he was no nearer effecting an entrance than before; the cellar was found to be literally full of fungous growth, which had borne the cask aloft to the ceiling, where it stuck, upheld

produce such huge structures from spores which are invisible to the naked eye, and command that which is so minute to become, in a few hours, an organised structure of such magnitude and such complication of arrangement, we must not let our praise and adoration stop here; for in the minuter growths which we shall soon examine, we shall find as wondrous an exhibition of surpassing skill as in these larger products. The microscopic fungi—those which by fastening on his crops become the bane of the farmer, and are in God's hand a means whereby he can cut off our staple article of food, and "destroy the staff of bread," under the name of "the smut in wheat" (*Puccinia graminis*), or cause our bean or potato crops to perish—are among the most surprising of vegetable productions, and will hereafter engage our attention. We shall, in our next paper, point out the immense supply for the wants of man which might be found in the esculent fungi that our land so freely produces, both spontaneously, and

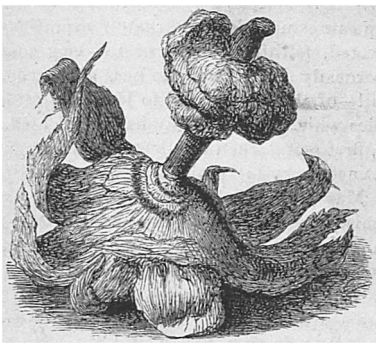


FIG. 2.—LYCOPERDON STELLATUM. THE STELLATED PUFF-BALL.

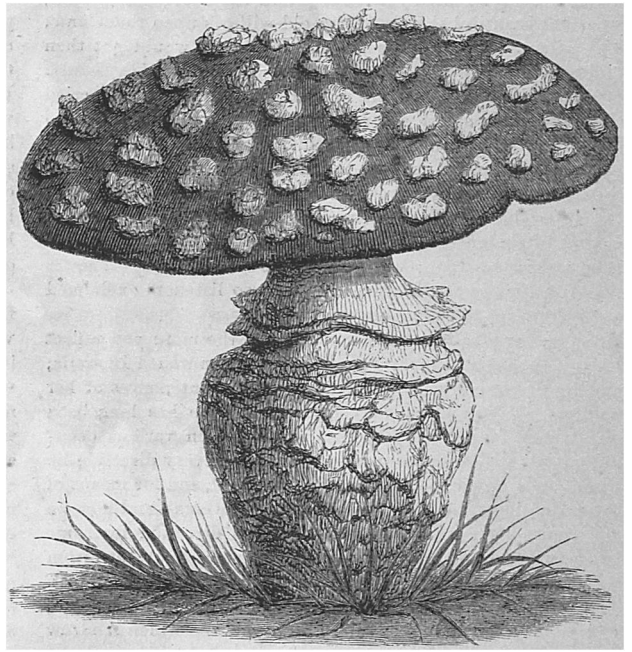


FIG. 3.—AGARICUS MUSCARIUS. THE FLY-BLOWN AGARIO (SMALL SPECIMEN).

by funguses, the produce of the wine which had all leaked out and formed this monstrous growth!

But although these monstrous and sudden growths call for our wonder and admiration of the power of Him who can thus

also when cultivated—a supply of which our continental neighbours so fully avail themselves; whilst, in our own country, they are allowed to rot unnoticed in the place where they have sprung up.

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE.—BY ANNA MARY HOWITT.

CHAPTER IX.—CONCLUSION.

"My bride,
My wife, my life! O we will walk this world
Yoked in all exercise of noble end;
And so through those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows. Indeed I love thee: come,
Yield thyself up: my hopes and thine are one:
Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself.
Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me."

Alfred Tennyson.

LET us, at all events, have a gleam of sunshine in which to bid farewell to these scholars in the School of Life. It is full three years after the mournful deaths of Leonard and of little Cuthbert, that we meet our friends, Lucretia, and Mary Gaywood, and John Wetherley, sauntering along an umbrageous lane leading from Clifton Grove towards the Hellings. Of poor Leonard's fate the three friends had been conversing; and this may account for a certain mournfulness which overshadows their countenances; but as they speak of the noble

steadfastness with which Agnes has pursued her path, purified by her deep sorrow, an undying love permeating her every word and deed—her whole life devoted to the service of suffering humanity—their faces beam with an enthusiastic joy.

"Her true union with poor Leonard was more accomplished by his death," remarked Lucretia, "than ever it could have been by his life. Through her he still acts and lives in the world; his spirit of universal love has entered into her, and become active through her moral being. To her imaginative

nature, the ideal of Leonard, mingling, as it does, with bitterest regret for her own hardness—though even I, John, am ready to confess now, that I formerly accused Agnes Singleton too severely of an absence of tenderness and love—has been, and ever will be, probably more effective in its influence for good and nobleness upon her life, than the marriage with the living Leonard ever could have been, even had he returned her love with the full force of his being. Love may do his work by separation at times rather than by accomplished union. But you, dear Mary and John, shake your heads; you are sceptics! And may *your* lives, beloved ones, in their accomplished union, read a yet stronger and yet more beautiful moral. But, dear ones, I am not going to preach you a marriage homily; I am going to consult you about a scheme which Andrew, and Mr. Ellis Stamboyse, and I have in hand. We were very busy in discussion, you may remember, the other evening when you two returned from your long day's ramble, bringing with you that grand sheaf of water-plants, and that beautiful sketch of the old willows upon the island; but as we had not quite settled affairs, we would not then tell you."

"Oh, I'm afraid you did not tell us, dear Lucretia," cried Mary, with her sweet, gay voice, "because John and I were so full of our adventures, and so selfishly absorbed in our happy day; do, do forgive us! But what is the scheme? three such wise people can only have concerted a marvel of wisdom!"

"It is that I shall become book-keeper for the London branch of the great house of Stamboyse—book-keeper with a salary of £200 a-year; what think you of that?"

"You *book-keeper*, Lucretia!" her two listeners exclaimed with one voice of astonishment.

"Yes, the idea is novel, I confess, but the more you reflect upon it the better I fancy you will like it," pursued Lucretia, smiling at the surprise written upon the countenances of her auditors. "You know that Ellis Stamboyse has long been an advocate for the employment of women in various occupations usually closed to them—and how in every direction he would open up paths for their enlightenment, and for means of their usefulness, both to themselves and others—and how he and Agnes have worked together in this direction for some two years past you also know—and how since his return from America he has become still more earnest upon the subject. The other day he offered Andrew this situation in London, which has a much higher salary than the one which Andrew fills at Nottingham; but Andrew hesitated, both because he dreaded, on account of his delicate health, the increased responsibility and the greater confinement; and because, delightful as would have been his near neighbourhood to us, he still regretted leaving his old routine of business and his old haunts—you know Andrew's ways! And then, all at once, Mr. Ellis proposed that I should become their book-keeper with £200 a-year! I was not so much surprised as you are; all became clear to me at once, and many things could thus be accomplished about which I was anxious. I had wondered often how I might, after dear Mary was gone, employ my time in such a manner as should, to some degree, banish my longing for her dear presence. Dearest Mary, now that I have found this employment, I can speak of this selfish regret of mine in losing you, who these long years past have been my sister, daughter almost, and most beloved of friends." Mary could only reply by pressing Lucretia's hand fervently to her lips—"And then, too, I shall be so rich; there will be no fear for sickness or old age in years to come; and, besides, I have secretly determined never to rest until Andrew gives up his situation and comes and lives with me in London—and we will take a cottage within a short walk of you at Brompton—so there will be plenty of money provided for our own wants. I already have fixed upon the cottage even. And it will be most edifying, I assure you, dear ones, to see me setting off to my *office* each morning punctual as clock-work by the omnibus; and still more edifying to see me sitting within my glass case, like some rare stuffed animal, with my big ledgers about me. I mean to become the very model of a book-keeper; it will never do for a *woman* to do

such a thing imperfectly, you know. And thus you see it is all arranged, and Andrew comes over to-morrow evening to give me my first lesson in posting the ledger. Yes, dear Mary, you and John may laugh, but the thing is no joke!" And thus, gaily talking, the trio passed along towards the old-fashioned village of Wilford, where John had determined that he and Mary should be married, and where the three were now waiting until the marriage-day arrived.

The reader will perceive that various changes must have taken place in the heart of our friend John Wetherly since we parted with him, seeing that we find him now a third time in love. John himself laughed with Mary about what he called "his very susceptible heart," and had confided to her the history of his youthful passion for L'Allegro; at which both Mary and John smiled, recalling L'Allegro, as they now knew her, the very elegant, but insipid, fine lady, whose interests in life were bounded by the desire to see "her dear husband and babes" enjoying every possible creature-comfort, the "babes," be it observed, adorned always in the most exquisite and costly of attire, fashioned by no meaner hand than that of the fair L'Allegro herself. They smiled not at L'Allegro's love—so far as it extended—but at its extending within such narrow bounds, and sighed also when they believed that they had divined what was the peculiar and secret trial of Ellis Stamboyse's life, disappointment in the compass of his pretty wife's soul, which he so willingly would have cultivated and enriched with precious seed, till it should have brought forth roses more beautiful than those which glowed upon her pretty cheeks, and she became truly a *help-mate* for him in this world of stern labour. John also had confided to Mary his more serious passion for Honoria, and with words of a deep earnestness declared that if ever Mary found in him the devoted, faithful friend and life-long companion which he so earnestly desired to be to her, she must ascribe much—if not all—of their happiness to Honoria, and to the upright principles which she so sternly had inculcated, to the aspiration after, first moral, then intellectual perfection, which she had thought necessary to inspire him with. "No, never, beloved Mary," had John once exclaimed, "could I ever have recognised the beauty of your- and Lucretia's lives, had it not been for Miss Pierrpoint's influence. Never, never could your beautiful love have been bestowed upon me, except for her teaching of *wisdom*; for even had she by her wealth and influence raised the poor boy from the turnip-field into the painter and well-to-do man, that would not have crowned me with the rarest of blessings, the love of a pure and noble-minded woman such as you! Yes, sweet little Mary, let our gratitude towards, and love of, this dear and noble friend show itself to her through the accomplishment of our beautiful dreams of an ideally lovely marriage. Oh, Mary, how lovely, how pure and noble a future lies before us. God only grant us strength to accomplish some of these beautiful aspirations through His holy power and love!" "Amen!" spoke Mary in a low, deep voice, and clasped her beloved with unutterable tenderness in her soft arms.

John Wetherley truly must have been born under a lucky star; for not only upon his return from his continental sojourn, enriched with study and purified by a profound mental struggle in which he had come forth nobly victorious, did he achieve an extraordinary success in his artistic life; but gradually had dawned in his breast a fresh love for sweet Mary Gaywood, who had been developed during his absence, by her sorrow over little Cuthbert's death, and by the gradual course of time, from the gentle, sweet young girl into the sweet, joyous-hearted, and intellectual woman. This love, virginal in its purity as his love of L'Allegro, elevated in its moral tone as his love of Honoria, yet differed from either through its blessedness in being returned, and that with a fullheartedness which at times fairly intoxicated John. Mary, if anything, grew graver and more thoughtful; but her gay, joyous nature lost nothing by the mellowed earnestness which this deep affection, with its beautiful but awe-inspiring responsibilities, cast over her.

And now, as we have seen, the wedding-day was rapidly

approaching, and we find our friends located at the quaint little village where first we made John's acquaintance. John is staying with his good old grandmother, who yet lives, of course looking older, but hale and merry as ever, although we have lost sight of her these ten years past. She lived in the same little cottage, but which had, thanks to John's never-ceasing thoughts of the dear old woman's comfort, been enriched with many useful presents. She had a girl, too, who did whatever house-work was beyond the old body's strength; and altogether old Sally Wetherley was regarded quite as a lady by her village acquaintance—not that she regarded herself as a lady; she would have been the first to ridicule the idea, and still hobbled about her work with a certain pride, although her dream of former days was strangely realised, and she “had a maid-of-all-work, and could live like a lady.” Her greatest pride was “my grandson John.” “He’s a brave lad’s my John, not a bit of pride, I assure you, Dolly,” she had said some weeks before to her old gossip—“not a bit of it, and that you’ll see when he comes down here next week to look out for lodgings for the lady as he’s going to be married to, and as is coming down here to stay, as she must do, you know, she and her sister. John says in his letter they’s made up their minds long ago only to be married by Mester Brewster, as had laughed at him for painting with ‘t powder-blue and mustard, when he was a bit of a chap, thou remembers, Dolly; and that he and Mary—that’s th’ lass’s name—none of your fine fly-away names, you see—had rather be married in th’ old Wilford church, than in St. Peter’s at Rome, or in any o’ th’ fine chuches he’d seen in foreign parts. And it seems that the lass knows all about Wilford, and has a brother as lives in Nottingham; and she sends her affectionate love to me, thou sees, Dolly—nay, I forgot thou wast so blind, and could not see th’ writing, though it is big;—my lad always writes big and black; for he knows my eyes is bad, though not so bad as thine yet, Dolly. And so thou sees it’s no wonder I’m a bit in a flurry, and must help Bess to red up th’ place. But I must say, Dolly, I’m a bit scared when I think a seeing my grand lady granddaughter as is to be! Not but that she’ll be a good lass to my lad, I feel sure; but she mayn’t like, thou knows, to find, as her husband was such a poor lad, thou sees, and has still such a poor old woman for a grandmother, as can’t talk fine.”

And terribly “scared” indeed was good old Sally the evening of Mary and Lucretia’s arrival. “Now, grannie!” exclaimed John, bursting into his grandmother’s cottage, his face radiant with joy,—“make haste and come across the green. Mary is come! I’ve just brought them from Nottingham; they are going to drink tea, and are a little weary after the journey, or would have come on directly with me—but I said I’d fetch you to drink tea with them—come along, come along. Mary’s so impatient to see you,” cried he, kissing the old woman, “I’ll put your bonnet on—and there’s your shawl!”

“But bless thee, lad, I can’t, I tell thee; thou quite upsets a body—thou’s rumpled my cap, and flustered me ever so, lad!” cried the old grandmother, a little bit ruffled in temper as well as in dress. “I can’t go and see thy fine Lunnon acquaintance I tell thee, Johnny, thy fine ladies in this old rag; thou should’st a bit more respect for me—and you’re come ever so much sooner than Bess and I expected—we’ve been redding up the hearthstone thou sees, and have been making some pikelets. I was just a-going to clean myself and be ready. Thou shouldn’t be in such a hurry, lad!”

“But you’ll do beautifully, grandmother,—that nice russet gown Mary will admire if she looks at it; but she’ll only look at your dear old face that I’ve told her about so often,” said John, laughing.

“Make me believe that, lad,” interrupted his grandmother with a touch of her old hastiness of temper, “as if a young fellow like thee talked so much to his sweetheart about an old woman. I can’t go i’ this shabby rag, I tell thee; and my puce silk’s laid out all ready up stairs to put on, and my best cap, and my beautiful reticule with thy pretty flower paintings upon it, as I use only on holidays—thou remembers it, John,

Miss Emma Dale as was, made it up for thee: I’ve not forgotten it if thou has.”

But John’s laughter and his grandmother’s oration were interrupted by a sun-beam gliding into the room and pausing beside them: it was dear Mary. “Have you quarrelled again about the comforter, then,” said a merry voice, and in a moment more the old grandmother and Mary were folded in a warm embrace.

“Well, Johnny, and this is thy wife then, that is to be,” said the old woman at length, sinking down upon a chair, and wiping her eyes which some way were full of tears, as were the eyes of John, and of Mary, and of Lucretia, who stood upon the threshold of the cottage. “Well, but she’s a sweet lass, and looks as though she’d make thee a brave wife—and do thou, lad, make her a brave husband, which is a harder thing, John, than being ever such a brave grandson as thou’s been to me. ‘Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also praiseth her,’” added the old woman in the beautiful blessing of Scripture, and then fairly sobbed outright.

Surely a more beautiful prelude to a beautiful and holy married life could not well be imagined than were the quiet weeks spent by John and Mary at Wilford before their marriage. Mary and the old grandmother became very fond of each other, and could not outdo one another in singing his praises. Lucretia and Andrew and Ellis Stamboyse had many discussions leading to results equally rational as the one we have already recorded, and Mary and John spent days of almost celestial joy among the woods and fields, looking down into the depths of each other’s being with an unreservedness such as could alone exist between two such loving, pure, and enlightened hearts, and mirroring each other in their souls, mutually to gain truth and strength. Not a spot hallowed to Mary by any incident of John’s childhood but was visited by them; “for,” said Mary, with her deep love welling up into her sweet eyes as she looked into her lover’s face, “I must not alone belong to your present and to your future, but must be able to live with you in the past. To me it is so beautiful, John, that I also have childish associations with these dear fields and groves; for it would seem to me so sad and painful if ever there had been a time when no association bound us together. And that you knew and loved Cuthbert and poor Leonard, and love Lucretia only next to me, is indeed a great blessedness; but it could not be otherwise, for my soul acknowledges you as an old friend. I cannot imagine how I felt or lived before this deep emotion formed a portion of my life.

And a great deal more such love-making went on whilst John sate painting among the pleasant trees and blossoms, with Mary beside him, forgetful of the book which she had begun to read aloud to him; or when John, flinging aside his sketch, would throw himself at her feet in the grass, and gaze into her dear face with a nobler but not less intoxicating passion than had flamed up within him for his lost love.

“I do think my Johnny’s nearly off ’s head with love for that lass,” had been Sally Wetherley’s remark to old Dolly; “only think, I came the other evening upon the two whilst they was sitting down at the bottom of the garden—thou knows the turf-seat, where John’s made the strawberry-bed as is so full o’ fruit this season—and there, only think, if th’ silly chap had not made her a crown o’ flowers which he’d put upon her head, and was lying down ’mong the grass at her feet; and just when I and Miss Gaywood hobbled up—they’d been too throng in their talk to heed us—there was the lass a-laughing like a madcap because my silly big booby of a grandson—who, they say, is a mighty great man, and has his bits a paintings written about i’ th’ Lunnon papers—had just seized hold of her little foot and covered it with kisses—her foot, Dolly—if it had been her pretty white hand I should not have wondered, but her foot, in its little light-coloured, dandyfied boot, as these ladies wear. ‘Johnny, Johnny, thou

big booby !' I cried, laughing a'most as much as she did, 'a dozen years hence, think you, wilt te' be as fond and foolish as now?' 'Not quite so foolish, grandmother, I hope,' the dear lass replied, stopping her laughter, 'but quite as fond.' And if you had seen how proud and happy they both looked up toward me, thou'd a thought with me, Dolly—though we know what wedded life is—that mappen a dozen years hence he might be as fond of her, if not so foolish !"

But we must hasten over to the conclusion of our story, tempting as it is to linger among such pleasant scenes and such hearty people—tempting as it is to elaborate with loving pen pictures of that rare beauty in the world—a deep, pure, earnest, and devoted love between two equally noble beings.

We can but glance at the golden bridal morning, when Mary, awakening from a refreshing and deep sleep, found Lucretia already dressed watching her, as she so calmly slumbered on, with surprise and deep love; for now that the eventful morning had arrived, Lucretia was by far the most agitated of the sisters. As for John, he had never slept a wink all that night, so agitated and intoxicated was he with joy and awe. He had been strolling through the woods and fields, living over his past life; and, in the transient darkness of the balmy June night, offering up fervent prayers to the Creator of this beautiful universe for strength to perform the duties of the new life stretching out before him, and this, too, in such a manner that his own life, and the lives bound up in his, might be in harmony with the beauty and glory pervading all nature; that he and Mary, as an Adam and Eve standing amidst the garden of Eden of nature, though having eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, should cleave to the good, and listen unfearingly to the voice of the Almighty, wandering through the garden, serving Him, though unseen, hourly with obedient and adoring hearts, until that blessed day when they should eat of the Tree of Life, and enter into the glory of their Lord.

When the sun rose redly up, and sent his slant beams quivering through the tangled underwood of a coppice where John had flung himself down upon the mossy ground, and when the happy birds burst into their morning anthem, and the dew-drops showered down from the thickly-blossoming may-trees, and the corn-crake was heard uttering his shrill note with his quiet voice through the deep mowing-grass, John came forth from his meditations, and gathering trails of lovely wild creepers and flowers, slowly sauntered towards the village. Two milk-maids, going out to their cows, passed him as he walked along, his agitated face half-concealed by his sheaf of greenery, and, looking back after him, observed to each other, "Why, that's Mr. Wetherley, isn't it?—old Sally's grandson; and to-day's to be his wedding-day—bless the young man! But, depend upon it, he's so full of joy he's not been able to sleep all this blessed night!"

And when Mary was about to array herself in a lovely white silk dress—a present from Honoria which had arrived the previous day—Lucretia opened the door of their chamber, and led Mary, much surprised, to a table in a little ante-room, where, most tastefully festooned with wild creepers and flowers, stood a quaint little old looking-glass. "See what John has been doing whilst you have been fast asleep! He has been wandering about all night, I fancy, from the look of his face, too happy to sleep, and came ever so early, begging me to let him adorn the old looking-glass with flowers; for he says the image of you, darling, in your bridal dress must be encircled by a worthy and appropriate frame. See how lovely it is! And he would not take any of the exquisite flowers sent last night from the Hellings' hothouses, but brought these simple wild flowers. Oh, Mary, he loves you dearly, tenderly; but can he love you as I do, as I have done for these long years, ever since you were the little motherless child?" And the sisters clung together in a tight embrace, and it was now Mary's turn to cheer her sister, and to call again bright smiles forth from amidst her loving tears.

We must not dwell upon the marriage blessing pronounced by Mr. Brewster over the lovers in the quaint little church, where Mary knelt before the altar in her pure white dress,

with a ray of sunshine falling upon her, till, like Keats's lady, she looked "a splendid angel newly dressed, save wings, for heaven." Nor yet may we dilate upon the grandeur of dear old Sally Wetherley, who stood during the ceremony, big reticule in hand, between Lucretia and Mrs. Brewster; nor how the three tender-hearted women shed tears, and inwardly besought blessings upon the united lovers,—this we leave, also, to the imagination of the reader. One little ray of sunshine we must, however, notice, as being present at the marriage ceremony, beside the ray which glanced over and kissed sweet Mary's bridal garment; and this was a tall figure robed in a white muslin morning-dress, gleaming forth, like a fresh morning cloud, from a distant pew in the church. It was Honoria; but before the little bridal party had recovered from the emotion of the solemn ceremony, the beautiful white figure had floated, cloud-like, out of the church, and was nowhere to be seen, either in the churchyard or upon the road. Upon the wedding breakfast-table lay, however, a little note, with the most fragrant of orange-blossom bouquets, which, opened by Mary's trembling fingers, and read by her and John's eyes half-blinded by happy tears, ran thus:—

"Beloved friends,—All happiness, all peace to you! I was at your wedding, you see, though you believed me still with Agnes at *Kaiserswerth*—but I could not lose a true moment of happiness in witnessing the solemnisation of such a marriage as I believe yours will be. I am not going to disturb you now, dear John, dear Mary, do not fear; such moments in life ought to be sacred even from the dearest of friends. But I shall await you with the warmest welcome and congratulations upon your return from the Peak. Drive immediately, when you return to Nottingham, to Pierrpoint House. I shall be there, and will command even our poplars to shiver you a warm welcome!"

"Your affectionate friend,

"HONORIA PIERRPOINT.

"P.S.—Mary must not trouble herself in bidding her sister adieu with the thought of how lonely she will be. I and the Hellings shall look after that."

And in Pierrpoint House, standing within that stately dining-room, which long years before had sent such a chill into John's heart, did Honoria welcome her friends; and beneath that portrait of the stately Lady de Callis, who no longer chilled him with her enigmatical eyes and proud smile, did Honoria pronounce their marriage homily with the same eyes and lips as were pictured in the portrait of her grandmother.

"Welcome, dear friends," cried she, stepping forth with her gracious, yet majestic air, and taking a hand of each wedded lover. "Welcome! It is seldom a marriage gives me any satisfaction, any hope; but yours does. You must not fail in the fulfilment of your dreams of an ideally beautiful marriage; such marriages becoming realities, are the great educators of the world, the sole regenerators of society—such married pairs as you may, perhaps, become, are the only reformers of our great social evils in whom I place much faith. John, through your beautiful Art, ennoble your own soul and your wife's soul; and, Mary, through your life, ennoble your husband's Art. And your children—oh! I have much joy in the thoughts of your children, for they will be worthy denizens of this beautiful world—strong mind and body—healthy to the core. And we—for I shall love them as *my* children, John—we must rear them up so that they may become worthy denizens of a yet more beautiful, more perfect world. We must always treat them as little angels; and as they sit upon their little benches far down in the lowest forms of the Great School of Life, let us seek—we the elder scholars—so to teach and train their innocent hearts, that in later years the Great Schoolmaster may not have to whip and buffet them as He has had to do with us, His disobedient scholars! Dear friends, dear brother and dear sister, do you associate me with you in this holy labour!" Their answer was spoken rather by warm pressure of the hands, and by the united looks of love in the faces of the married pair, than by words.